Characters

- MOTHER/WRITER
- RICHARD FOX
- PASSION PLAY ACTOR
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Act

MOTHER

I finally found the policeman who beat my son that January night in 1991. He ran a theater on the steps of the Soldiers and Sailors monument on Riverside Drive at 89th Street.

Homeless people who had lived in the park under the 89th Street overlook now lived on 89th Street on the sidewalks, in the hallways of apartment buildings 311 and 145 Riverside Drive, as well as in the apartments with the legal tenants.

This policeman who had haunted me for nine years performed a play nightly: it was an ancient miracle play.

How amazing that this man should appear on the very street where I lived.

Evenings I could hear the actors, from the roof of my brownstone where I went to rest. The "Soldiers" spoke to "Christ."

(Quoting actors)

"And I have gone for gear good speed. Both hammers and nails large and long, then maybe boldly do this deed."

I walked to the edge of the roof and listened.

This man who I had thought of constantly since 1991 was playing Christ.

The soldiers spoke again to him.

(Quoting actors)

"The foulest death of all shall he die for his deeds. That means cross him we shall."

It was quire by accident that I had found him. I had come out of my brownstone one morning when I saw a band of disheveled men walking up Riverside Drive in the rain. They stopped when they came to the Soldiers and Sailors monument. one stepped forward and climbed the steps to the doorway of the statue. I recognized him immediately.

I had seen Richard Fox only on videotape. The night of the beating my sister hid in the doorway of her house and photographed him: he handcuffed my son and kicked him again and again in the stomach.

I had wanted to find him. I wanted to find his house somewhere in the suburbs of Virginia, but the lawyers concealed any information about Fox from me.

"You're behaving like a mother," the lawyer said. "You could hurt your son's case. Don't interfere. We have a detective looking into this policeman's history. Anyway, we've heard he will no longer be with the force. He's going to work for the Secret Service at the White House. Mrs. Alexander, please go back to your classes. Don't interfere. You will hurt your son's case."

Now nine years later I sat on the grass at the monument and watched Fox: acting the role of the Savior. The name of the troupe was The Oliviers.

I recognized the other actors. They were the former district attorney, the county manager, the police chief, and two policemen who had been involved in my son's case. They had been at the hearing.

At that time I wrote to them as well as to the governor, congressmen, the NAACP, and friends.

"I am writing to you again. On Friday night, January 11, my son was knocked to the ground and beaten in the head and face, kicked in the chest and stomach and dragged in the mud by a policeman. My son was stopped because he had a tail light out..."

I wrote again and again:

Congressmen
The Black Caucus
The County Manager
NAACP
Chief of Police

My beloved son was also a Rhodes Scholar and traveled the country giving speeches for the causes of Blacks.

Nine years had passed. It was 2000.

The sun and the ships on the Hudson were still wonderful. But I hadn't been to Broadway for more than a year. It was impossible to make my way through the men on the sidewalks fighting among themselves. Shootings occurred daily.

I remembered the lovely street fairs when I strolled and bought faded voile dresses and sweet oils in green bottles. The children and David and I gorged on ice cream and crimson ices and bought paperback books on trees and gardens: trees and shrubs, trees for shade and shelter on the lawn.

"Mom," the children said, "We want another ice."

Now I was often hungry. Food was at the market on Broadway and 91st, but unexpected shootings on the street kept me fearful. I saved sacks of potatoes so that in case of shootings I would always have something to eat.

It was then I daydreamed of old movies, *The Sound of Music*, Fellini's *Amarcord*. The old movie theaters, the Thalia, New Yorker, the Symphony, had closed long ago.

Refugees from New Jersey arrived every morning at the 79th Street Boat Basin where armies of people lived.

Riverside Park between 86th Street and 116th was dangerous: inhabited only by gangs.

I remembered when my baby sons and I had walked in the snow deep into this park down to the highway, across to the shore of the Hudson. The Circle Line cruise ship sailed past. We waved, then walked to 116th Street and Broadway and stopped at Prexy's for

chocolate. I dreamed of the beauty of Columbia University Mall where civil unrest and chaos now never ceased.

Members of The Oliviers were all white. They seemed protected by the soldier costumes they wore. My neighbor, a casting director, Judy, said she thought The Oliviers were one of the groups who traveled from national monument to monument trying to find asylum.

Judy still delivered tapes of her clients to an agency on 47th and Sixth and said things in that area were sometimes pretty much as they had been in the past.

She said the most popular movie downtown was called *Suicide Mission*, about a group of unhappy housewives from Davis, California. Sometimes she still went shopping at Saks and once bought me a straw hat. I wore it when I sat on the roof to read. Sometimes she had to stay downtown for the night. You never knew when bombings would occur. Still she was younger than I was and less afraid.

Often people who made it across the Hudson lived in the Path Station for weeks. Civil strife had destroyed a great deal of New Jersey. Yet some suburbs remained intact.

In the brownstone I lived in it was impossible to tell friends from enemies: the five floors were occupied by Bosnians, Californians, Haitians, Neo-Nazis: all were split into subgroups and each group had their own agenda, wars, and language.

My sons were somewhere in Washington but I didn't know where.

I lived on money from the royalties of my plays, a very small but sufficient amount.

City officials were constantly drowned near the Statue of Liberty.

Nights I continued to watch the ancient miracle play from the roof.

One night I came into the park just as a scene began. The soldiers spoke.

Although my asthma was very bad due to the conditions of the dirty streets, I tried to speak along with the actors.

And I never took my eyes off Richard Fox. His costume was very shabby; soldiers closed in upon him. I realized how agonized I still was by him.

I decided to join their company. I told them I had once been a playwright and had taught at Harvard. I was relieved to see they did not remember my name from my son's case.

I became their only Black member. They said I could rewrite a section of the play.

That night as I sat on the roof writing I remembered my son screaming when the policemen kicked him in the

stomach, my son who as a child laughed at his turtle and ate pop tarts and watched *Rawhide* with his cowboy hat on.

The next night I arrived at the monument early.

On that night The Oliviers allowed me to perform with them. I was to be one of the soldiers.

The play began.

(The play appears before her. Three SOLDIERS *and Jesus*-RICHARD FOX--*stand directly opposite her.)*

SOLDIER

We have them here even at our hand.

SOLDIER

Give me this wedge; I shall it in drive.

SOLDIER

Here is another yet ordand.

SOLDIER

Do take it me hither belive.

SOLDIER

Lay on them fast.

SOLDIER

Yes, I warrant
I thring them sam, so mote I thrive.
Now will this cross full stably stand;
All if he rave, they will not rive.

SOLDIER

(to Christ)

Say, sir, how likes you now This work that we have wrought?

SOLDIER

We pray you say us how Ye feel, or faint ye aught.

*(*WRITER *speaks with them.)*

SOLDIER

We! Hark! he jangles like a jay.

SOLDIER

Methink he patters like a pie.

SOLDIER

He has been doing so all day, And made great moving of mercy.

SOLDIER

Is this the same that gan us say That he was God's Son almighry?

SOLDIER

Therefore he feels full fell affray, And deemed this day for to die.

SOLDIER

Vah! qui destruis templum...

SOLDIER

His saws were so, certain.

SOLDIER

And, sirs, he said to some He might raise it again.

SOLDIER

To muster that he had no might, For all the cautels that he could cast;

As Pilate deemed, is done and dight; Therefore I rede that we go rest.
SOLDIER

This race mun be rehearsed right, Through the world both east and west.

SOLDIER

Yea, let him hang there still, And make mows on the moon.

SOLDIER

Then may we wend at will.

SOLDIER

Nay, good sirs, not so soon. For cartes us needs another note: This kirtle would I of you crave.

SOLDIER

Nay, nay, sir, we will look by lot Which of us four falls it to have.

SOLDIER

I rede we draw cut for this coat-Lo, see how soon--all sides to save.

SOLDIER

The short cut shall win, that well yet wot, Whether it fall to knight or knave.

SOLDIER

Fellows, ye thar not flite, For this mantle is mine.

SOLDIER

Go we then hence tite; This travail here we tine.

MOTHER

I spoke my lines coughing, wheezing...then found my place directly before Fox and struck him in the head with a hammer.

(Shs does.)

(He falls.)